

Sleep-

Information and a self-help guide

Introduction to Sleep

Healthy sleep

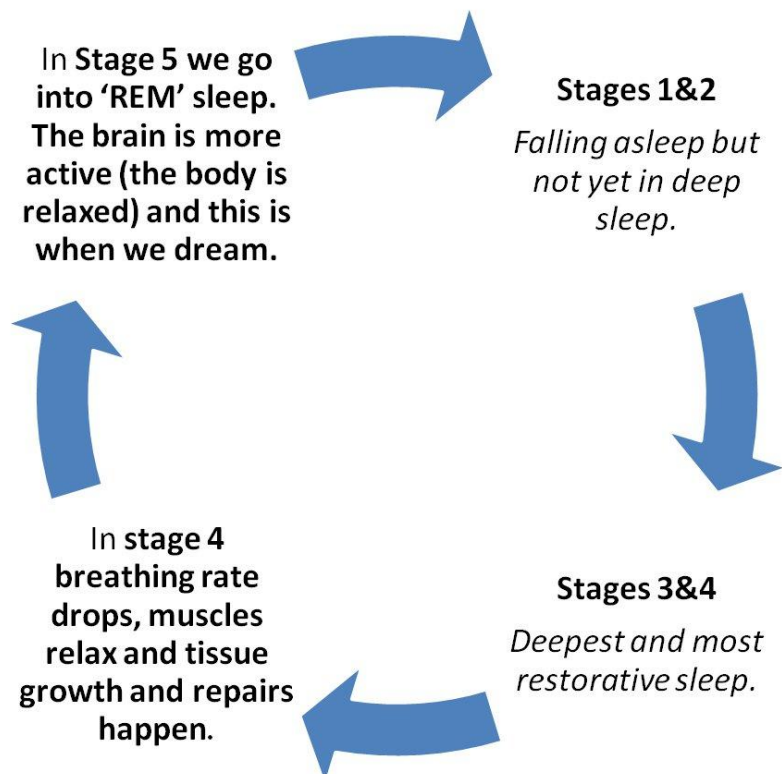
Wide healthy range – different at different ages. It can take several minutes to fall asleep and on average, people will wake once or twice; this is quite common and not unhealthy.

Sleep cycle

For the majority of the night we are in 'non-REM' sleep.

REM stands for rapid eye movement, because in this stage although our eyelids are closed you can see the eyes moving quickly. This is the stage in which we dream and usually occurs several times a night, although we only ever remember dreams if we wake during or just after this stage.

The amount of time a person needs to sleep every night can vary; there is a wide, healthy range. It can take several minutes to fall asleep and on average people will wake once or twice in the night, this is quite common and not necessarily unhealthy.

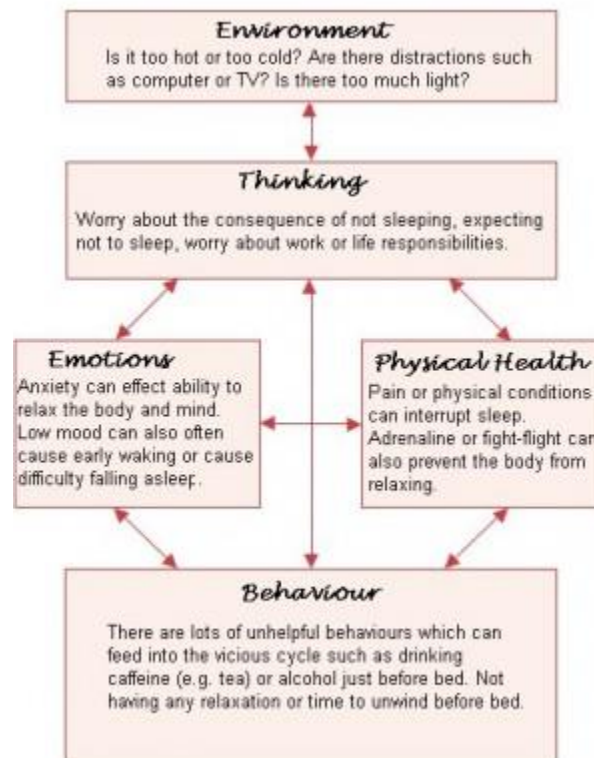


Sleep Problems

Sleep problems can be anything from difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep which can lead to frequent waking throughout the night or waking too early, and sleeping too much.

Insomnia is when a person has trouble sleeping for a long time; it is persistent and difficult to manage.

Many things can disrupt sleep; for example a single stressful or traumatic life event, ongoing life difficulties, unsuitable sleeping environment, painful or uncomfortable physical conditions. Things we do can also disrupt sleep, even things which we intend to help us sleep! Such as going to bed early or daytime napping if we've had a bad night, this can disrupt our daily routine and cause problems for us the following night.



Lack of Sleep

Effects of lack of sleep

- Thoughts – reduced concentration, memory, and attention, worry about lack of sleep and expecting more problems
- Behaviour – reduced/slowed behaviour, reduced coordination, easy to make more mistakes than usual
- Emotions – irritable, anxious, low mood, tearful
- Physical – reduced energy, fatigue, easily tire out, perhaps also feeling restless or fidgety, difficulty staying alert.

Unhelpful sleep habits

- Don't watch the clock
- Drinking caffeine or smoking a cigarette just before bed can wake the body up. Caffeine can actually stay in our system for several hours after drinking
- Daytime napping – this can disrupt a healthy daytime routine by confusing the body and may reduce the amount of sleep you get during the night
- Alcohol can sometimes seem like it is relaxing us but it reduces the quality of sleep and can actually wake us up through the night as it affects our central nervous system.

Helpful sleep habits

- Try relaxation just before bed – listen to music, have a warm milky drink, or take a hot bath. Basically do whatever helps you, as this will signal to your body that it is time to rest
- Keep a routine, so wake up in a morning and get out of bed. It is tempting to sleep late if we have had a night of poor sleep, however, this will just keep the problem reoccurring the next night
- Go to bed when you are feeling tired, this may take longer than you think, but at some point the body will start to feel tired
- If after 20 minutes (without strict clock watching) you are still awake, get up out of bed. Then do something but nothing too stimulating, such as watching TV or drinking caffeine.
- Repeat the steps above.

The useful tips above help to support a healthy sleep cycle. However, if your problems are persistent it may be useful to contact your doctor or mental health worker for further support and advice.